

thing; in order to signify that such a belief within us is real, we must demonstrate it via acts of obedience:

“[A]nd He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of the whole world*. By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked” (1 John 2:2-6).

An indication that one truly knows Messiah Yeshua, is if one chooses to keep His commandments. **If one does not keep His commandments, then John indicates that one is a liar who does not have the truth.** This is very serious. If a person claims with his or her mouth and “believes” in the heart that Yeshua is the Messiah, and yet does not expel any effort to keep (any of) His commandments—notably those of loving God and neighbor—there is an obvious disconnect. Perhaps such a confession of faith was just some kind of lip service and not a true heart confession? *Thankfully, only our Eternal God can truly judge the heart intention of any person.*

How debilitating has it been for today’s Christianity to often leave obedience out of the gospel message? While none of us can “earn” salvation, our being cleansed from sins and spiritually regenerated is to follow with our being obedient to the Lord. How can today’s Messianics become a force of positive change, helping to not only see many Jewish people come to faith in Messiah Yeshua—but many Christians turn toward a path of diligent obedience to God?

These, and many other questions, should be reflected upon during this season of reflection and repentance, as we consider the themes of the Fall high holidays. As we each meditate upon the issues before us, and consider a future time when we will be standing before our Creator, **may we each be encouraged to choose the eternal life provided in Messiah Yeshua with all our hearts, minds, and souls!**

Ha'azinu הָאָזִינוּ

Hear

“The Rock of Salvation”

Deuteronomy 32:1–52

2 Samuel 22:1–22:51

Moses’ approaching death has inspired him to make some very emotional appeals to the people of Israel, seen in the words of Deuteronomy 32. He knew how his days of leading Israel were soon coming to an end. As any good shepherd would be, he was very cognizant of his sheep’s proclivities. For forty years he had observed the Israelites’ behavior in a variety of circumstances, and he knew their inclinations. As is true of most sheep, they were prone to wander. Moses attests to this in some of his final statements:

“For I know your rebellion and your stubbornness; behold, while I am still alive with you today, you have been rebellious against the LORD; how much more, then, after my

death?...For I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands” (Deuteronomy 31:27, 29).

With Moses getting ready to depart, he delivered some final instructions about what was to be done with the *sefer ha'torah* (סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה) that had been compiled during his tenure of leading Israel. The teaching he had delivered from the Lord had been written down as a witness that could be referred to in the future—especially as it would remind Israel of their responsibilities before God, and what would happen if the people or their descendants disobeyed Him:

“Take this book of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may remain there as a witness against you” (Deuteronomy 31:26, 30).

The written testimony of the Lord, which has been communicated through Moses, was to be a permanent witness for His people to seek instruction and guidance. In one of his final acts, a song is delivered by Moses to the people of Israel, making up most of our Torah reading for this week (Deuteronomy 31:1-43).⁵⁶ After this message is communicated, Moses again admonishes Israel to take his words very seriously:

“When Moses had finished speaking all these words to all Israel, he said to them, ‘Take to your heart all the words with which I am warning you today, which you shall command your sons to observe carefully, *even* all the words of this law. For it is not an idle word for you; indeed it is your life. And by this word you will prolong your days in the land, which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess” (Deuteronomy 32:45-47).

Ancient Israel was commanded to seriously heed what Moses has told them, because their aged leader wants them to “live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess” (NIV). Thankfully, this song—as well as the entire Torah—have been memorized and studied over the centuries by many followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob! Millions of people the world over have taken to serious heart the Biblical axiom of choosing the ways of the Lord—the *ways of life!*

A Song of Moses

In a distinctively didactic ode, the song witnessed in *Ha'azinu* not only reviews some of Israel's past history, but also prophetically declares what will transpire to Israel in the days following its entrance into the Promised Land. Moses' words describe what will happen as “Jeshurun” waxes fat and forgets the commandments of God.⁵⁷ The required chastisement is softened, but perhaps only very little, by promises made to vindicate Israel in the future.⁵⁸ Veiled references to the future period when Assyria and Babylon will be used to punish Israel are seen.⁵⁹

As you read the song Moses delivers in Deuteronomy 32, his words wax eloquently. One of the significant themes seen is how the Lord is referred to as the Rock or *tzur* (צֹר).

⁵⁶ Please note that the Song of Moses referred to in Revelation 15:3 is most probably the Song of the Sea of Exodus 15, something employed in the daily liturgy of the Jewish *siddur*.

For a further discussion, consult the article “The Song of Moses and God's Mission for His People” by J.K. McKee, appearing in the *Messianic Spring Holiday Helper*.

⁵⁷ Deuteronomy 32:15-17.

⁵⁸ Deuteronomy 32:36-43.

⁵⁹ Deuteronomy 32:21-27.

The Hebrew term *tzur* appears in a number of distinct places to refer to God, and in one place to describe the pitiful “rock” of false gods:

- “The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He” (Deuteronomy 32:4).
- “But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked—you are grown fat, thick, and sleek—then he forsook God who made him, and scorned the Rock of his salvation” (Deuteronomy 32:15).
- “You neglected the Rock who begot you, and forgot the God who gave you birth” (Deuteronomy 32:18).
- “How could one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, unless their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had given them up? Indeed their rock is not like our Rock, even our enemies themselves judge this” (Deuteronomy 32:30-31).
- “And He will say, ‘Where are their gods, the rock in which they sought refuge?’” (Deuteronomy 32:37).

When we look at how the term *tzur* is used, we get the impression that just as granite or limestone gives the presentation of firmness or majesty—so is our God steadfast and reliable. In delivering his song to Israel, Moses wants the people to look to the Lord as a Rock they can rely on. He wants them to have vivid recollections of their past, present, and future relationship with Him—so that they might persevere through the foreordained rough times. As you reflect on these significant verses in this Torah portion, are you reminded of any past saints who used these very verses in troubled times, to comfort them through affliction?

One who immediately comes to my mind is a young King David, as he avoided the efforts of King Saul to exterminate him. In 2 Samuel 22, we see that in a time of great turmoil, David turned what is communicated by the Deuteronomy 32 song to find solace:

“And David spoke the words of this song to the LORD in the day that the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. He said, **‘The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; My savior, You save me from violence.** I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies. For the waves of death encompassed me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me; the cords of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the LORD, yes, I cried to my God; and from His temple He heard my voice, and my cry for help *came* into His ears” (2 Samuel 22:1-7).

This incident resulted in what became Psalm 18:

“For the choir director. A *Psalm* of David the servant of the LORD, who spoke to the LORD the words of this song in the day that the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. And he said, ‘I love You, O LORD, my strength.’ **The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.** The cords of death encompassed me, and the torrents of ungodliness terrified me. The cords of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called

upon the LORD, and cried to my God for help; He heard my voice out of His temple, and my cry for help before Him came into His ears. Then the earth shook and quaked; and the foundations of the mountains were trembling and were shaken, because He was angry” (Psalm 18:1-7).

The words of King David should encourage us to rely upon the Lord as our Rock—for strength, direction, protection, and deliverance!

Testimony to the “Rock”

As I ponder these thoughts, I am reminded of an important testimony that my wife Margaret often shares. She has mentioned many times the tragic loss of her first husband, Kimball McKee, who died at 41 due to melanoma cancer. She frequently recalls some of the last words that Kim uttered to her in the hospital room just before he fell into his final coma. As a born again Believer and devoted evangelical Christian, Kim would often refer to Jesus Christ as “the Rock.” In his walk with the Lord, frequently reading the Old Testament, the image of the Messiah as the Rock of Salvation was seriously impressed upon his heart.

During his final days, the cancer had spread to Kim’s brain stem. Just before slipping away, Margaret was in his room, and Kim sat straight up and wide awake in his bed. He pointed through Margaret to an image that he was seeing beyond her. Kim looked straight into the eyes of his wife, and told her “I can see the Rock and hear the music!” Right at that point the ICU nurse came in and ushered Margaret out of the room. *These were his last words.* The monitors indicated that he had triggered a code blue and he was immediately put on a respirator. He was dying, but according to his last words, he had seen the Rock of his Salvation who was waiting for him with the chorus of Heaven playing, very similar to what Stephen experienced (Acts 7:55-60). While Kim doubtlessly wanted to live, the words of Paul, “My desire is to depart and be with Christ” (Philippians 1:23, RSV), were realized for him in 1992. Two days later, Kim McKee was released from the respirator and went to be with the Messiah Yeshua.

When Kim was buried next to his parents, his grave marker included the epitaph, **“Jesus Christ, the Rock of my Salvation.”** As Margaret, John, Jane, and Maggie frequently remind me—they will all one day be able to touch the resurrected body of Kim McKee again, when Yeshua returns “with all His saints” (1 Thessalonians 3:13) at the Second Coming. Some of the most inspiring words we can remember, even if we do sincerely believe that our loved ones who knew the Lord are in Heaven with Him now, regard how the power of Heaven will come to Earth at the time of resurrection. As the Apostle Paul says,

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Yeshua the Messiah; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself” (Philippians 3:20-21).⁶⁰

Thinking about the inspiring testimony of Kim McKee, we can be encouraged by how in the future—all of us as redeemed saints—will one day surround the throne of God **and will be singing praises to the Rock** (Revelation 15:3-4; cf. Jeremiah 10:7). The Rock of our Salvation is the Lamb of God sacrificed for our sins. As John the Immerser confessed,

⁶⁰ For a further discussion, consult the publication *To Be Absent From the Body* by J.K. McKee. Also useful is Bruce Milne, *The Message of Heaven & Hell* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002).

“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Being a part of the company of redeemed from all ages and time periods, and being reunited with our loved ones and ancestors—should cause us to be so overwhelmed with joy, that we simply want to praise our Creator!

It is immensely beneficial for each of us to take some special time this week to reflect upon these foundational truths which are so imperative for our faith. Whether we get lost in the eloquence of a beautiful song that speaks of the marvelous works of the Lord throughout the ages, or whether we praise Yeshua for His work of redemption—the most important thing is that we understand how God has interjected Himself into our lives so that we might have salvation. **The Lord Yeshua is the Rock of our Salvation!**

In these days of reflection and returning to Him, come to the Lord with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. *His arms are wide open.* Turn and run to the One who is the Rock of our Salvation!

V'zot Ha'berakhah זֹאת הַבְּרָכָה This is the blessing “Full Circle”

Deuteronomy 33:1–34:12
Joshua 1:1–18 (A); 1:1–9 (S)

The final Torah portion from the Book of Deuteronomy completes the traditional annual cycle which will begin again in the Book of Genesis, after the commemoration of *Shemini Atzeret* (Eighth Day Assembly) and *Simchat Torah* (Joy of the Torah). *Sukkot* or the Feast of Tabernacles has come to a close, and at this time it is a tradition in the Jewish community to celebrate the end of the yearly Torah readings. Frequently at this time, these extra days associated with *Sukkot* are believed to be an indication that the God of Israel is so pleased with the time of rejoicing and fellowship, that He desires to have one more day of fellowship with His people.

From a prophetic perspective, if the Feast of Tabernacles is symbolic of entering into the Millennial Kingdom with Yeshua reigning over the Earth, then the Eighth Day Assembly would be appropriately symbolic of entering into the eternal state and New Heavens and Earth. When people often think of the future resurrection and the redeemed being ushered into an existence that we can right now only speculate about—it is natural for us to think about the beginning, and the way things originally were in the Garden with Adam and Eve.

Hebrew readers are often keenly aware of how the last word of Deuteronomy, *Yisrael* (יִשְׂרָאֵל), ends in a *lamed* (ל), and the first term in Genesis, *b'reisheet* (בְּרֵאשִׁית), “in the beginning,” begins with a *bet* (ב). When you put the *lamed* and *bet* together, you form the Hebrew word *lev* (לֵב) or heart. As the annual Torah cycle is completed, one might be reminded of how his or her heart must be committed to learning from Moses' Teaching with sincere intentions. The admonition of Deuteronomy 6:6 is, after all, “These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.”